



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Consumer
Service

Office of Analysis and
Evaluation

Nonparticipation and Problems of Access in the Food Stamp Program: A Review of the Literature



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Consumer
Service

3101 Park Center Drive
Second Floor
Alexandria, VA 22302

Nonparticipation and Problems of Access in the Food Stamp Program: A Review of the Literature

Gretchen Schafft, Ph.D. and William Millsap, Ph.D.

A Product of
LTG Associates, Inc.

6930 Carroll Avenue
Suite 410
Takoma Park, MD 20912

875 E. Canal
Suite 1
Turlock, CA 95380

February 1996

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	1
II. ASSESSING NONPARTICIPATION IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM.....	6
III. PROBLEMS OF ACCESS AND RELUCTANCE OF POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE PERSONS TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC BENEFIT PROGRAMS.....	18
IV. EFFICACY OF CLIENT ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES	25
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	35
VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY	38

NONPARTICIPATION AND PROBLEMS OF ACCESS IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper reviews literature about participation and nonparticipation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) and initiatives within it that have informed hard-to-reach client groups about food stamps and/or assisted clients in the application process. The review encompasses five sections, the first of which discusses the background of efforts to reach client groups who appear to be underrepresented among food stamp participants. The second section reviews research literature based on survey data that describes patterns of non-participation in the FSP. The third section of the paper reviews literature based on direct interviewing or ethnographic observation of people in financial need and their attitudes toward public benefit programs. These studies come from a variety of programs, including those serving not only food stamp recipients but particular populations of clients, such as people with AIDS, homeless persons, mothers and children, and elderly individuals. The fourth section examines systematic efforts to provide outreach and client assistance. The conclusion of the review, in the fifth section, discusses what the literature offers to our understanding of patterns and problem of access to FSP participation.

Since the 1930's, publicly-funded programs have provided a safety net, so that a basic level of health and welfare is available to all of the population. The Food Stamp Act of 1964, establishing what has become one of the most significant of these benefit programs, was designed to help distribute surplus farm produce as well as to improve the well-being of low-income families and individuals in the United States (U.S. Senate 1985). Policy and program objectives within the Food Stamp Program (FSP) have always focused on providing nutritional benefits to ensure a healthy nation by enabling people who meet specific income, asset, and work requirements to receive these benefits. Begun as a set of pilot projects initiated by President Kennedy through an

Executive Order in 1963, by 1973 the Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act changed the FSP to a national entitlement program, providing benefits to all eligible persons certified within the guidelines. The FSP is currently by far the largest food assistance program in the United States and one of the largest Federal assistance programs generally, second only to the Medicaid program. The FSP served 27 million people in fiscal year 1993 with a budget of \$22 billion.

Distributing food stamps equitably to all those who are eligible and wish to participate, even those hardest to reach, has been a central purpose of the FSP and other government benefit programs. This goal has been monitored by a series of research studies which have analyzed characteristics of participants and determinants of participation in the program. The program objective, to provide the entitled benefits to all who qualify, has produced client-assistance initiatives, including demonstration projects, designed to learn more about the barriers that exist to enrolling and participating in the FSP among certain groups of potentially eligible people.

Public Law 91-671, passed in 1971, required State food stamp agencies to reach out to low-income households to inform them of their potential eligibility for this benefit. This outreach was not tied to any nutrition education, but was meant to support participation by those most in need. Specifically targeted through Federal and State support were the elderly, migrant farmworkers, and named ethnic groups. In 1973, a Federal court order mandated that \$278.5 million be spent on the evaluation of these outreach plans and remedial action to "insure" participation of eligible households. In 1975, regulations were passed that required staffing for outreach at the State level.

In the 1980's, these legislative mandates were weakened. Some State and local agencies reported that they felt mandated outreach resulted in an unreasonable work load. As a result, in 1981, P.L. 97-35 left outreach to the discretion of the States and Federal funds were barred from being used to share costs of outreach that States might wish to conduct. In 1987, the prohibition on outreach was lifted from the Federal FSP and money was made available to target the homeless (Nichols 1989).

In 1988 Federal funding was once again authorized for food stamp outreach under the Hunger Prevention Act. Under this act, State agencies could spend part of their Federal dollars on outreach. States received 50-50 Federal matching funds for these client enrollment assistance efforts. Also, the FSP began to require that bilingual services be provided to non-English-speaking groups, including the use of translated certification materials.

Participation levels have become a commonly used criterion for evaluating Federal programs. In order to inform the Federal government how well the FSP is serving the target population, that is, those eligible for benefits, the participation rate is a useful marker, for it measures the proportion of those persons eligible for food stamps who actually apply for and receive food stamps.

While participation in the FSP has never encompassed all of the people in the population estimated to be eligible, it has increased among both households and individuals in the past decade. In the 1970's, more than half of the households eligible for food stamps did not participate in the FSP. In 1983, a study reported that 55 percent of those eligible for food stamp benefits were still not enrolled (Olson and Xiao 1991). A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study estimated, however, that 60 percent of eligible households and 66 percent of eligible individuals were being served by the FSP in 1984 (AARP 1991b, 18). Low enrollment among persons eligible for social programs was not limited to the FSP, in the mid-1980's, but was found to be the case in the Supplemental Security Income Program (SSI) and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs as well (Coe 1983).

The use of food stamps declined by one million participants between 1980 and 1987, with one million additional persons classified as being below the poverty level but not using food stamps (U.S. Conference of Mayors 1988). Currently, it is estimated that 69 percent of all eligible households and 74 percent of all eligible individuals are participating in the FSP (Trippe and Sykes 1994). The current participation figures in the FSP may reflect efforts made by Regional, State, and

local food stamp offices to reach particular groups of recipients who were underrepresented in enrollment figures, such as migrants, the elderly, Native Americans, linguistic minorities, and others.

Many programs, including the FSP, have identified the elderly, disabled, homeless, rural poor, low-income working poor, and non-English-speaking populations as target groups. These groups are often the hardest to reach and may be found outside routine service provision networks. The USDA has supported client assistance activities in the last few years, in part by funding demonstration projects to determine effective means to reach specific populations such as homeless individuals and families, elderly persons, low-income working people and their families, persons living in rural areas, Native Americans, recent immigrants, and migrants. These projects, conducted by non-profit organizations or governmental agencies, use specific techniques in efforts to reach their target groups. The successes and difficulties experienced by these projects are being monitored to determine what might be effective and efficient ways of reaching the underserved population groups.

While the literature regarding food stamp participation is sizable and has been reviewed regularly, this paper focuses on the reverse of participation, that is nonparticipation, an aspect which is more difficult to understand. The paper reviews three distinct bodies of literature: first, survey-based research on food stamp participants and participation; second, observational and ethnographic studies of the problems of access to the FSP and other benefit programs; and third, evaluation reports of efforts at outreach and client assistance in several benefit programs. The review focuses on three issues:

- What information exists on nonparticipation rates and characteristics of those who do not participate in the FSP?
- What information exists about problems people have in accessing public programs?
- What information exists on the efficacy of certain approaches to overcoming problems of access?

Much more has been written about participation in the FSP than about nonparticipation. In 1991, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported that there were only four studies on nonparticipation in the survey literature, three of which were done in the early 1980's (AARP, 1991a). Most of the literature reviewed here centers on participation, with nonparticipation addressed by extrapolation, for usually nonparticipation is treated as a reciprocal to an assumed, optimal participation level. Exceptions are an early article by Coe which directly addressed nonparticipation as a central issue in the FSP and some studies done by the USGAO. These studies, however, are limited to demographic projections based on what is known about food stamp participants' characteristics (Coe 1983) or telephone survey information (USGAO 1990).

The studies based on statistical analysis of sample survey data share several common features:

- Eligibility estimates are drawn from census data or samples and are based on demographic information;
- Potential participation in benefits programs such as food stamps is measured against the estimated eligible population; and,
- The level of nonparticipation is assumed to be the difference between actual participation and projected eligibility levels.

In short, statistical methods are employed to project estimated potential levels of participation in the general populations. However, there is little research that uses specific case studies, behavioral assessment, or other methods to draw conclusions about why populations participate or do not participate in welfare benefit programs. The USGAO study, made in collaboration with the University of Michigan (1990) described below, is an exception to this.

A second kind of literature and research is based on observation of the processes by which people obtain or do not obtain government benefits. It also uses personal interviewing with clients and others who would be eligible for benefits if they could, or chose to, apply in order to find out what barriers may stand between potential clients and their participation. This research offers

description and insights into clients' decision-making processes. Examples, presented below, include the work by Elliot Liebow and other researchers who gather data directly from the people they describe.

Each kind of reporting has its advantages and limitations. Large-scale studies of nonparticipation using national surveys reduce sampling bias, but cannot estimate the extent to which processes are involved that respondents either cannot or will not describe. Projections of the characteristics of nonparticipants from participation data do not attempt to assign reasons for the patterns that are found, but merely describe the population groups who do or do not take part in benefit programs. On the other hand, observational studies, based on in-depth knowledge of the populations that are studied, do not sample and cannot project accurately to a national population. Their description of problems of access are insightful, but are subject to researcher and sampling bias.

II. ASSESSING NONPARTICIPATION IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

The survey research described in this section is based on a microsimulation model that provides an estimate of the food stamp participation rate, "...where the numerator is the number of persons or households participating in the program...and the denominator (is) the number of persons or households eligible for the program...." (Trippe 1989, vii). Estimates of the denominator in this ratio are, of course, what demand attention from researchers. In the past decade, the methods to obtain these estimates have been improved to provide a closer approximation of those eligible for the FSP.

In this section, literature from studies using two different data sets, the Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) are examined, as well as several reviews of participation research conducted over the past years. PSID survey data rely on yearly responses of a sample of people assumed to be eligible for food stamps

based on their income and assets, while SIPP data are taken from quarterly surveys that include more parameters, including monthly income and expenses, that better match food stamp eligibility requirements. In addition, several reviews of participation studies are included in this section.

These household surveys may over-estimate the eligible population because they do not take into account all exclusionary factors that are in the food stamp regulations. They may also under-estimate participation rates when they depend upon self-reported food stamp participation, because respondents may not wish to share that information. Because of their sampling of the general population, however, they provide a broader-based view of participation measures than ethnographic or observational studies are able to do.

Richard Coe (1983)

“Nonparticipation in Welfare Programs by Eligible Households: The Case of the Food Stamp Program.” *Journal of Economic Issues*. 17(4).

In this early article, Coe examined nonparticipation in public welfare programs and, in particular, the FSP using the PSID data set. He looked at responses of those households to questions asking why they did not participate in the FSP, and noted that it is an implicit assumption that households which are eligible to participate in public transfer programs will do so. He found evidence that nonparticipation in welfare programs by eligible households was far more common than anticipated at that time. This was especially true of the elderly who qualify for SSI as well as housing assistance programs. The reasons why this is so are not well understood due to the lack of adequate data. The author then examined this issue with respect to the FSP.

Based on these data, Coe estimated that only 45 percent of eligible households received food stamps. This failure to participate in the program was attributed to five problem categories: 1) informational concerns; 2) problems with program parameters, namely the amount of the benefit; 3) administrative difficulties; 4) physical access considerations; and, 5) attitudinal issues.

Of the 55 percent nonparticipating households, the primary reasons given for not taking part in the food stamp program were insufficient information about the program and uncertainty about potential eligibility. Other reasons had to do with administrative difficulties with the application process. Only one percent were discouraged by the small size of the benefit in their own cases.

Coe found that participation in services for which one is eligible increases with the size of the benefit that one can gain from application to a program and is negatively related to an employed head of household. "Age-sex-marital" status is a configuration that affects participation. Married couples appear more likely to be participants than single men. Unmarried men are more likely to be told that they are ineligible for participation in welfare and food stamp programs regardless of actual eligibility. This indicates that there may be certain conditions, not barriers, that influence one's perceived need for, and willingness to accept, assistance. Further demographic analyses, he noted, are only proxies for understanding the behavioral reasons of groups not choosing to participate in the FSP. Coe suggests in this article that policy ramifications of the findings are clear-cut: more attention must be paid to informing potential clients about their eligibility to participate in the FSP.

USGAO (January, 1990)

"Food Stamp Program: A Demographic Analysis of Participation and Nonparticipation."
Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office, (GAO/PEMD-90-8).

The General Accounting Office (GAO) issued a series of reports on food stamp nonparticipation based on data from 1979-1981 and, in this report, data from the 1987 PSID. This study asked two questions:

1. What demographic characteristics or factors are associated with FSP participation?
2. What reasons do food-stamp-eligible households give for not participating in the program?

Researchers interviewed a sub-set of respondents to the PSID survey whom they believed to be potentially eligible for food stamp benefits. They determined specific household characteristics and correlated them with responses about food stamps.

The study found that 87 percent of households participating in other welfare programs also participate in the FSP. Demographic characteristics associated with participation were persons receiving SSI, households headed by a non-white single female, and those with children. Each additional child in the household was associated with a 67 percent rise in the likelihood of participation in the FSP. By contrast, with every \$1,000 increase in annual income, households were five percent less likely to participate in the FSP.

Nonparticipation was associated with the following factors:

- A reported lack of desire for benefits (38.2%);
- Lack of, or incorrect, information about the FSP (36.8%); and,
- Perceived or actual problems of program access (25%).

The GAO study, like Coe's work, identifies the reasons people give in interviews for not participating in a benefit program. However, the content of the categories is not explored and questions are left unanswered about the reasons why benefits are not wanted, what information is incorrect or missing, and what problems potential clients have with the program or access to it.

In a number of studies commissioned by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), now Food and Consumer Services (FCS), attention was focused on the levels of participation in the FSP and indirectly to nonparticipation in the program. The following six studies are surveys with this focus.

Susan Allin and Harold Beebout (November, 1989)

**"Determinants of Participation in the Food Stamp Program: A Review of the Literature."
Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS.**

This extensive review of the existing literature on participation concluded that, according to recent studies, only 60 percent of eligible households participate in the FSP. Three questions are examined:

- What are the principle reasons eligible persons or households do not participate in the FSP?
- How do participation rates vary across different types of households? What are the reasons for that variation?
- On what basis do eligible households make their decisions regarding participation? How might changes in program structure or operations influence those decisions?

These questions were then answered by reviews of studies that use survey data to elicit reasons for nonparticipation, correlate participation levels with household characteristics, and use

Allin and Beebout described the limitations of methodologies that have been used to understand variations in participation rates across eligible populations and identified characteristics that have been associated with participation and nonparticipation. Large-scale survey research produce responses that are too general to allow much interpretation about actual decision-making processes that individuals and families engage in when deciding to apply for or not to apply for food stamps, but they cannot explain the actual behavior of households. This lends little guidance to those interested in identifying ways to influence participation behavior among eligible households. To gain further understanding about how low-income households acquire information and make program participation decisions, the authors suggested, observational and ethnographic studies may be needed. All studies must be up-to-date if they are to provide information that can be used to develop policy, for older studies may not be predictive over periods of time. SIPP data may be best used to update results of older data, for it best replicates household characteristics relevant to FSP participation. The authors urge a better understanding of the motivation behind the behavior of nonparticipants in order to make policy decisions.

Carole Trippe (1989)

"Estimating Rates of Participation in the Food Stamp Program: A Review of the Literature." Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS.

In a complementary report to that of Allin and Beebout (1989), Trippe reviewed literature on FSP participation rates stressing that it was unreasonable to expect universal participation in any voluntary social welfare program, but that participation should be representative of eligible populations. As with the Allin and Beebout study, the estimated participation rates varied depending upon measurement procedures, data sources, and the study methodology employed. Researchers have used two different types of data sources to estimate the number of participants in FSP; administrative data which provide actual counts of participants but do not directly address eligibility and, therefore, nonparticipation levels; and, household surveys such as the Current

Population Survey (CPS), the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), and more recently, the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). Trippe discussed how to account for the disparities in the figures, why they vary, and their changes over time. The report reviewed the latest data source for calculating participation levels of the FSP, the SIPP, developed to estimate with greater precision the number of eligible clients who actually participate in public benefit programs. This survey collects data on a monthly basis from a statistically drawn sample of households. Of interest to any serious reviewer of food stamp participation and nonparticipation levels is the discussion on the inability to directly measure food stamp eligibility, the lack of data on this topic, and how different data sources are used to get at this issue.

The author's conclusions are that monthly SIPP data allow greater precision in estimating eligibility, FSP participation levels, and lastly, nonparticipation rates in the program. It is argued that the use of SIPP data, even employing differing analytic methods, can arrive at a more precise understanding of food stamp population dynamics.

Harold Beebout, et al., eds. (1990)

"Food Stamp Policy Issues: Results from Recent Research." Washington, D.C.: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Taking a snapshot on the "state of the art" in food stamp policy, the Food and Nutrition Service brought together a number of recognized scholars on food stamps to assess where the program is and where it might be going--problems, issues, and policy ramifications for welfare. Noting that the FSP has been in place for decades, it has understandably undergone considerable evolution to meet competing program objectives in a changing national environment.

Despite significant growth in the FSP, the authors stressed that hunger and problems of welfare of low-income households appeared to be increasing as the FSP entered the nineties. The papers in the volume cover such topics on FSP participation as:

- How well does FSP reach the target population of low-income households?

- Does the FSP improve diet quality for low-income households?
- How well do FSP and other food assistance programs meet the needs of vulnerable groups such as the homeless? and,
- How should FSP employment and training policies be structured to best serve participants?

As with earlier reports, the editors noted that like other welfare programs, not everyone who is eligible for food stamps participates in the program, yet the level of participation is used as one indicator of FSP success. Further, the report acknowledged that in most areas, the FSP is administered jointly with the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Medicaid programs, with food stamps providing about 33 to 50 percent of the family's total purchasing power. Some limited discussion addresses the question of why some eligible households do not participate in the FSP. The author suggests from the data that they:

- Did not know they were eligible;
- Did not want or believe they needed food stamps; or,
- Found the cost of participation too high in relation to the level of benefits received.

One conference participant concluded that 50 percent of FSP dynamics (changes in participation levels and composition) may be due to changes in household composition (e.g., income changes, number of persons, etc.) and reflects the changing family in U.S. society.

In order to understand nonparticipation by seemingly eligible households more adequately, the author suggested that data collection methods need to go beyond national household surveys (citing focus groups, detailed interviews, and other market research methods) to arrive at a more lucid picture of FSP nonparticipation patterns.

In addition to articles on FSP participation (nonparticipation, only inferentially), this report also described the impact of the FSP in meeting the dietary needs of FSP participants, FSP and the homeless, the elderly, and a comparison of the FSP with the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations. Lastly, the authors discuss the FSP's relationship to employment and training

programs for able-bodied food stamp recipients and the role of work in reducing the need for public assistance. Nonparticipation is not directly addressed in this compendium of articles.

Carole Trippe and Pat Doyle (1992)

"Food Stamp Participation Rates: January 1989." Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS.

While the primary focus of this study by Mathematica Policy Research was to determine FSP participation rates, nonparticipation was addressed far more thoroughly in this study than in many other works. This was the fourth in a series of reports seeking to provide estimates of rates of participation from the total eligible population and among selected subgroups within the overall population.

Comparisons were made with the earlier estimates of participation rates from the August 1985 and January 1989 studies which derived the estimated participation rates from a consistent data base (the SIPP) and a common methodology for generating the estimates. Based on these data, the report indicated that in the 50 States (and the District of Columbia):

- Fifty-nine percent of the eligible individuals participated in the FSP;
- Fifty-six percent of the eligible households participated in the program; and,
- Participating households received 66 percent of the benefits payable had all the eligible households participated.

The authors noted that even using a common data base and methodology, it was still quite difficult to calculate the number of eligible households with certainty, given problems of income under-reporting and various sampling issues.

Nevertheless, the authors concluded that the SIPP data enable a much improved simulation of the actual dynamics of FSP participants and nonparticipants within the eligible FSP population. It concluded that FSP participation stabilized at 59 percent among eligible persons between 1988-1989 after declining five percentage points between the years January 1985-January 1988. The

stable participation level of 1988-89 is attributed to no changes being made in the program in these years.

This study found that higher benefits correlated directly with higher participation levels. Indeed, participation rates were found to increase as potential benefits rose; participation rates were much higher among persons in households whose income was below the poverty level (74%); and households with earnings participated at a lower-than-average rate (32%). In other words, the higher the level of poverty, the more need there is, and the higher the benefit level, the more attractive program participation becomes to the eligible person in need.

Of the projected 5.7 million nonparticipating households among an estimated 12.7 million eligible in 1989, more than half (56%) had incomes above the poverty line, and 39 percent were eligible for only a small monthly benefit (less than one-fourth the maximum allotment). Overall, more than half of the nonparticipants (56%) were households with elderly persons or wage-earners (45%); about half of each of these groups fell below the poverty line. Finally, Trippe noted that most of the eligible nonparticipating households above the poverty line would have been eligible for relatively small monthly food stamp benefits (\$23 on average), which may explain their relative lack of participation.

No data were provided on reasons for nonparticipation in this report. Conclusions were inferred from the demographic profiles of the general population and a review of the subgroupings.

Alberto Martini and Susan Allin (December, 1993)

"Did the Characteristics of Food Stamp Program Entrants Change During the 1990-91 Recession?" Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS.

This research attempted to determine how the characteristics of food stamp entrants changed during the 1990-1991 recession. Indeed, the authors noted that dramatic changes occurred in the number of persons participating in the FSP, increasing from 18.6 million persons in July 1989 to 27.3 million persons in April 1993. From July 1990 (the date given for the start of the

recession) to July 1991, the FSP experienced an increase of 3 million participants or a quarter million persons a month.

The authors were interested in: 1) investigating whether the new FSP participants were similar to participants who were in the program prior to the recession, and 2) finding possible linkages between different rates of FSP participation and the slow recovery from the recession. The data for this study were obtained from administrative reporting of participating FSP households by the Integrated Quality Control System (IQCS). Household information was gathered by use of SIPP data. The authors identified four groups of participants in the FSP based on a range of factors, such as income, employment skills, assets, etc. These groups were labeled "secure," "precarious," "distressed," and "on the edge." Additionally, the groups were also classified as "long-term" and "short term" participants in FSP.

The report concluded that FSP participation rates were higher during the recession than prior to it, although former middle class households participated at much lower rates than predicted by their potential eligibility levels. It would appear that the dramatic increases are derived from a higher rate of participation of persons eligible for the FSP who prior to the recession had not participated. The additional economic stress apparently resulted in changing behavior patterns regarding this benefit. The authors did not attribute these decisions to participate to the state of the economy, nor did they address the issue of how such decisions might be made.

Carole Trippe and Julia Sykes (1994)

"Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: January 1992." Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS.

The authors reported that by January of 1992, the FSP was providing benefits to 74 percent, or 24 million, of the 33 million persons estimated to be eligible for food stamps--representing 69 percent of eligible households and receiving 82 percent of the benefits. By way of evaluating the participation levels among subgroups, it was found that:

- Almost all eligible children participated (under 5, 95%; under 18, 86%);
- One in three eligible elderly persons participated (33%); the majority of nonparticipating eligible elderly lived alone; and,
- Single parent households participated more than any other household, that is, if children lived with a single adult, their households were more likely to participate (100%) than if they lived with two or more adults (78%).

Confirming conclusions of the Martini and Allin (1993) study, this study also reported that the dramatic increase between January 1989 and January 1992 was driven largely by a higher participation rate among those already eligible rather than an increase in the number of eligible households. In short, the nonparticipation rate among eligible households went down, with 26 percent of eligible persons reported as not participating in the FSP. Nonparticipants were more likely to be elderly persons and households headed by a white non-Hispanic, ethnic groups other than African Americans, those with earnings or those eligible for only small benefit amounts. It was estimated that 92% of eligible African Americans participated, but only 61% of eligible Hispanics and 59% of eligible white non-Hispanics. Those with the least resources participate at higher rates than other low-income people, with 86% of those assumed eligible who live below the poverty line participating versus 21% of those above the poverty line. A combination of earned income and low benefits is related to nonparticipation, as could be expected.

In this study, excellent demographic characteristics were provided in several tables on these nonparticipants, but no discussion was devoted to reasons why they chose not to participate in FSP.

To summarize this section of the paper, survey data have shown that nonparticipation has been associated with a lack of information about the FSP, problems with physical access to food stamp offices, negative attitudes on the part of potential clients toward the procedures required to apply and participate, and less financial need than others who do participate. Nonparticipants are often older people, white non-Hispanics, those with incomes, or those eligible for small benefits.

Survey data cannot provide further information beyond the self-reporting provided by this format. Understanding possible underlying causes for nonparticipation requires a different approach to respondents.

III. PROBLEMS OF ACCESS AND RELUCTANCE OF POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE PERSONS TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC BENEFIT PROGRAMS

Problems of access and the reasons why many potentially eligible clients are hesitant to enter into the public benefit systems are not easily studied through systematic survey research (Allin and Beebout 1989). Either observational research and ethnography or multi-methodological studies are needed to reach beyond the answers people will give to an anonymous interviewer in short-answer, survey formats. Going beyond the first response of a respondent, which may be given to save face or to protect oneself by giving simplified and perhaps inaccurate answers to personal questions, is a job requiring a different approach from that of the statistician.

Ethnographic methodologies include participant observation in which the researcher spends a significant amount of time with the subjects of the study in order to obtain their view of the subject matter that is under investigation. Traditional ethnographies often take more than a year to complete, but this method has been increasingly used in short-term studies that incorporate careful observation and recording with goal-oriented interviewing and other data gathering techniques.

In most ethnographic or observational studies, observational data are used in conjunction with numerical data from demographic reports, records, surveys and the like to describe certain parameters of the research question. The numerical data are usually secondary to the narrative analyses. Researchers use a qualitative approach in order to learn about and to describe complex social relationships and to arrive at conclusions that may enlighten decisions for action and/or policy. Researchers using this approach are not as interested in tightly circumscribed questions or in testing propositions that have been developed outside of the social scene itself, nor do they

expect that social inquiry will lead to ultimate understanding of the nature of large-scale systems of social interaction. They are more likely to look for operating systems and negotiated rules for behavior and beliefs around specific domains of activity, events, and behavior. The results of their work point to areas in which survey research may be particularly fruitful.

Mark Rank (1994)

Life on the Edge. New York: Columbia University Press.

In this book, the subject matter is the welfare system, and recipients of food stamps play a large role. Using the state of Wisconsin as his focus in the years 1980-1988, Rank examined trends in participation in a variety of programs, including the FSP, Medicaid, and AFDC, through interviews with fifty families receiving assistance, through a statewide longitudinal caseload sample of welfare recipients, and observations of the welfare system and its operations. His observations on the welfare "climate" over a period of years included selected quotations from the press and speeches given by government leaders. In personal observations and interviews with clients during their application process, Rank found that they experience real fear in doing something new that requires significant literacy skills. Further, the loss of independence and the required reliance on government largesse is frightening for many. These are components of stigma in America with a long tradition in public opinion, according to Rank. The recipients of welfare benefits whom Rank interviewed believed that they were treated differently than others in the population. Two-thirds of his respondents believed that they were subject to others' disapproval as welfare recipients. As one respondent stated (Rank 1994, 137-138):

You really do have to be a strong person to be able to use Food Stamps and not get intimidated by how people treat you when you use them. And even then it's still hard. You feel people's vibes, you know, in the line. And the checkout people are almost without exception rude, unless you really get to know them. And I always feel like, "God, I'll be glad when I don't have to use these." So every time you check out, they always have to go up to the office to get change, so you got all these people waitin' in line -- it's like, you know, "These Food Stamp people."

Once about six weeks ago I turned to the woman behind me and said, "I don't know, I have not once come up here and bought something with Food Stamps where they didn't have to go and get change for, like a five or something, that they had in the drawer." She says, "Well, I guess it's just one of those ways that they're not making it easy for you."

Rank found that food stamp recipients participate in the negative attitudes toward persons receiving public benefits by complaining about their lack of initiative and their willingness to accept charity.

Elliot Liebow (1993)

Tell Them Who I Am. New York: The Free Press.

In this ethnographic account of homeless women living in a shelter in a suburb of Washington, D.C., Liebow described the difficulties in accessing appropriate help, including food stamps. Liebow volunteered within the shelter providing a number of services in the routine of daily life over a period of several years in the 1980's. At the same time, he observed and interviewed dozens of women (with their understanding of the research and their cooperation) about their lives and perceptions of public services, among other topics.

Liebow discussed issues faced by homeless women in depth. His approach to public benefits and the possible nonparticipation among his respondents is couched in both philosophical and observational terms. For example, he discussed the problem many homeless women have in answering questions. Among the homeless people Liebow interviewed, this was a major issue and a deterrent to entering public programs. Screening procedures of all kinds were abhorrent to the women he interviewed, and acceptance of services often hinged on the ability to retain a degree of privacy while being granted a benefit. Liebow saw the requirement to answer questions about their lives a "price they paid for being powerless."

Liebow reflected on the perceptions of service providers in the midst of eligible clients who do not respond as expected (Liebow 1993, 139):

To the rebuffed service provider or would-be friend, these are simply more instances of people who cannot act in their own self-interest, more instances of behavior unconnected to reality, more instances of craziness among homeless women. There seems to be little awareness that the failure of some women to cooperate may be, at bottom, a prideful refusal to capitulate to what they see as an oppressive system, and therefore a kind of victory for them.

This dissonance between service providers and clients was cited by Cohen (1990) as well, who reported that service providers, in this case mental health clinicians, could respond quite positively to patients whom others had defined as difficult and unable to be helped when additional training was offered. The health care workers' feelings of helplessness in this case were treated effectively.

Mary Belenky and her co-authors (1986) support some of Liebow's observations. They examined women in formal educational settings and in informal service provision settings. Using observational and interview methods, the authors identified characteristics of women's ability to obtain information and process it. One pattern they observed was common among women who were silently obedient to authority. "While they feel passive, reactive, and dependent, they see authorities as being all-powerful, if not overpowering...there is little evidence that the silent women could imagine themselves actively listening to the authorities' ideas, understanding what they were saying, and then choosing to obey" (Belenky, et al., 1986, 28). This inability to process information could lead to a reluctance to enter into situations in which interactive question and answer sessions are required and would tend to support Liebow's observations.

Other authors observing clients' response or non-response to participation in services have referred to the difference in needs between clients and providers. Nonparticipation as an expressive act of defiance is described in more academic terms by James C. Scott (1990). Passive aggression, failure to produce documents, to keep appointments, and to behave in expected ways may reflect, for some clients, a legitimate response to feelings of being on the fringe of society. Issues of

privacy are discussed in a 1994 report that examined the electronic transfer of food stamp benefits (Casey, et al 1994). In roundtable discussion with FSP and WIC Program recipients, privacy issues emerged as major concerns about participation in these programs. Curtis (1994a) also refers to the expectation on the part of providers that clients should be "grateful" recipients of food services at food pantries and within organizations that distribute food. Volunteers and staff expect that their reward will be, in large part, found in the recognition of their efforts through interactions with beneficiaries. This plays into the powerlessness of the poor, underscored by the lack of choice in food that is put before them. Proclaiming their status as "needy" through documentation required to receive the benefits, those who would like to receive benefits are viewed suspiciously until they prove their rightful position in the ranks of the certified.

Geraldine Olson and Jing-jian Xiao (Fall, 1991)

"Information-Seeking Characteristics of Hungry People." Journal of Home Economics, 11-16.

There is readily available information about consumers' information-seeking behavior, but little information about how people on welfare get information when they seek emergency food. In 1988, the Hunger Factors Assessment Project of the Oregon Food Share Program randomly selected 17 towns or cities in Oregon to collect this information. Surveys were sent to 944 respondents and 610 responded to the question: "Where do you hear about getting food help?" Twenty-seven percent of the respondents used the food stamp office as a source of information about emergency food. The authors reported that people who had used food stamps were more likely than others to use additional sources of information about where to get emergency food. This study indicated that the food stamp office itself may be an outreach mechanism through word of mouth, of eligibility worker to client, or through posted information.

Gretchen Schafft, et al. (April, 1988)

"WIC Benefit Target Study: Phase I Report." Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS.

In an observational study of benefit targeting among 18 WIC programs, beneficiaries reported in focus group discussions reasons for nonparticipation among people they knew. The barriers that they reported or that the researchers observed were subsumed under three categories: informational barriers; logistical and management barriers; and, affective and attitudinal barriers. Many potential clients did not know about the program or believed that they were not eligible. Many thought they were not poor enough to use the WIC program. This finding reflects that of Coe in 1983. Others did not understand the age limitations of the program or understand that women, in addition to children, were eligible, particularly during pregnancy. Citing Belenky's work, these authors observed that many women were unable to access programs on their own without waiting for an authority figure to reach out to them with information and with an invitation to participate. Information also was not communicated because of language differences and illiteracy in their native language, as well as in English. Simply translating materials was not enough when this double literacy handicap was present.

Logistics provided a problem for women with many children and no access to an automobile. WIC offices that adhered to a standard schedule were not able to reach people whose transportation and other obligations prevented them from coming into the office during particular times of day. Some pregnant women or women with small children had to wait to be seen for long periods of time. This was difficult for them and a discouragement to their participation. They found that applicants spend, on average, almost five hours completing the application process. Many chose not to complete the application because of the "hassle" involved: length of the process or problems getting to the food stamp office, confusion about the process, long waits at the office, and "unobtainable documents" required in the application process.

The WIC study also showed that clients and eligibility workers often do not understand one another's perspectives (a further confirmation of the Liebow study). Adversarial relationships occasionally developed as a symptom of power relationships, as well as differing values and needs. At times, staff members were anxious about physical interactions with clients due to possible infectious diseases, and in the health care setting, this caused changes in physical examination schedules and procedures. As in the Liebow study, this research showed that privacy was an issue for clients in the application and reapplication interviews which were often conducted in rooms that were not soundproof.

Similar to Rank (1994) these authors found that dealing with the visibility of being a recipient of a social welfare benefit was difficult for many WIC recipients. Cashing their vouchers at stores exposed them to the attitudes of the community that were sometimes negative. Other issues that concerned them included disclosing one's personal status regarding immigration, incarceration, or other information that could lead to drastic action, such as losing one's children, being deported, fined and/or jailed.

To summarize the literature in this section of the paper, major findings of ethnographic and observational research indicate that many potential clients of public benefit programs have a fear of losing self-esteem by participating in the application process. This comes about through lack of real skills, such as literacy and counting, but also as clients and/or applicants to public benefit programs are treated in ways they perceive to be demeaning. Many also fear the label that will be attached to them as recipients of taxpayers' dollars. Also, some potential participants refuse to take part in benefit programs because they do not want to give up information they hold privately. Some authors found that potential clients often waited for information to be brought to them rather than to seek out programs that could help them and their families. This pattern of waiting passively for an authority figure to tell them what to do may be more prevalent in women who also have problems with literacy and feel excluded from routine social interactions in their communities.

IV. EFFICACY OF CLIENT ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

Deciding on what methods best reach potential clients and can assist them in applying for the FSP or other benefits requires a two-step process. The first step is a needs assessment of the population groups that the program aims to affect. The results of such needs assessments indicate what barriers to participation exist and suggest which activities might provide potential clients with sufficient information about the program and its eligibility requirements. The second step in the process of determining what methods should be used to reach clients and potential clients is an evaluation of the efficacy of these methods, including their effectiveness and their costs. The results of these studies can help the FSP or other programs decide where to place effort and use resources.

Rigorous evaluations of client assistance activities are difficult to perform for a number of reasons, but can be extremely useful to program planners if sufficient care is given to their design. Studies that combine an overview of either single or extended programs and combine data gathering from a number of sources and critical respondents offer a strong chance of producing material that can be used for program improvements and policy initiatives.

Evaluations of client assistance activities often depend upon the efforts of program staff, who may be untrained in evaluation methodologies, to assess their own activities or to provide useable information for outside evaluators (Schafft and Randolph 1994; View 1994). Technical assistance in evaluation is then an important part of the evaluation effort. This both provides skill-building and promotes an effective outcome of evaluation that leads to future decision-making.

Many evaluations do not provide this extra support for program staff. Under these circumstances, the efficacy of the client-reaching and assisting methods is often estimated rather than analyzed in detail (AARP 1991b). Multi-site studies that evaluate such activities often show

great variation among sites, mitigating meaningful generalizations about the efficacy of client assistance methods per se (Schafft and Randolph 1994, View 1994, Peterson 1993, Silverstein and Puma 1992).

The use of comparative figures, such as those produced in the 1993 Social Security Study (Peterson), is very helpful in judging the value of activities designed to assist clients. Comparing the results in participation rates assumed to be due to the intervention of particular methods of client assistance with other matched demographic areas not using such methods or with the same area in another time frame approaches an experimental design. Such designs are not always available, however, because the researcher does not have access to comparative sites that can be used for analysis nor comparative data from other time periods. This is often a result of geographic boundaries that are not similar between the demonstration site and others or aggregate data that is collected for different purposes and from different catchment areas (Schafft 1995). Researchers also cannot control for other outreach activities that may take place independently and simultaneously to those they are following (Silverstein and Puma 1992).

Although the literature reviewed here on effective methods to improve client access and assistance offers only one example of a quasi-experimental research design, many studies are able to identify the unmet needs of potential clients as they attempt to gain access to various benefit programs and suggest ways in which programs can become potentially more accessible.

James L. Peterson, et al. (1993)

"Phase I & II Analysis for the Social Security Administration's Outreach Demonstration Projects." Baltimore, MD: Social Security Administration.

In this study of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) outreach activities, researchers studied and reviewed 22 demonstration projects conducted by nonprofit organizations to increase access to the SSI Program for potentially eligible clients. Researchers used a combination of research methods and incorporated into their findings statistical data on:

- Client characteristics and attitudes from intake interviews conducted within the 22 projects and extracted from the files;
- Social Security data on the history of payments made to SSI recipients and to individuals;
- Information on the demographics, staffing, and workload of the Social Security offices in specific locations; and,
- Monthly awards and their amounts for specific Social Security offices.

Textual data sources were more limited and consisted of materials in project files, including financial, quarterly, and final reports, observations made by government project officers in the form of site visit reports, and evaluations produced by the Social Security Administration (SSA) personnel. All of the textual analysis was done on secondary data, not first-hand observations or interviews. Information on individual clients was extracted from standardized intake interviews conducted at each of the projects by their own staffs and then aggregated into a data base.

At the time of the projects' inception, about 60 percent of the estimated eligible aged individuals participated in the SSI Program. The evaluation of these projects included individual evaluations of each site and analyses of aggregate statistics across all sites. The researchers were able to compare applications and enrollments during the project period to those in the same period prior to the project; they compared applications and enrollments with projected figures that would have followed a trend line from previous years; and, they compared applications and enrollments to matched sites over the same period of time.

This research particularly looked at the procedure of doing client assistance and made recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of this process. An interesting comparison made of the barriers grantees expected to find, but did not, and those they did find which they had not anticipated, indicated that an examination of client assistance activities over a period of time can reveal important information.

The researchers found that "some outreach effort was expended on people who would have found their way to SSA on their own, rather than on finding difficult-to-reach individuals who needed extra attention and assistance in applying." This phenomena of shifting outreach targets to those easier to reach was documented by Schafft and Randolph (1994) as well.

The authors were able to identify barriers by characteristics of the population such as race, sex, age, and size of community. Data showed that lack of information about the program and its eligibility requirements and a lack of knowledge of the existence of the program were two major barriers, but that stigma about receiving SSI was not as strong a disincentive as had been expected. Gender played virtually no role in enrollees' decisions to use SSI. Age and disability were significant barriers, as was the lack of transportation for some rural minorities, particularly Native Americans. Many groups, including those with specific illnesses, the homeless, and substance abusers often needed payee representative services and did not always understand this option.

The variability among projects in their ability to reach potentially eligible clients would have been "washed out" in any report which aggregated figures from all demonstration project sites. In this study, these individual outcomes and variations in the quantity and quality of data gathered is clear from detailed case study materials from each site appended to the body of the document. Cost analysis of the projects and some estimates of cost-effectiveness are included. The fact that outreach is an activity whose costs are often hidden within agency overhead also was noted by Bateman (1991).

This study found that the most significant barrier to SSI participation was lack of information about how to apply for benefits. This was the only barrier mentioned by people in every project. On the other hand, expected barriers, such as fear or distrust of the government program, did not occur in the way they had been predicted by project staff in their proposals. No barriers were found to be related to gender, but "disability-related barriers, isolation-related barriers, and information-related barriers rise with age."

Projects contributed approximately three percent of new applicants to the SSI Program in their local areas, but the authors believed that indirect effects of the projects may account for a larger influx of clients over the coming years. They also found that outreach is a more difficult process than the projects had anticipated, and that to conduct client assistance required strong management, particularly when projects were composed of components that were spread throughout a large area. Case management techniques, rather than simply attempting to enroll clients immediately in a benefit program, appeared to be necessary to the success of reaching the end goal of participation. Using client lists from another program to conduct outreach is an effective tool, as is disseminating information and using a toll-free telephone number followed by individualized client assistance. The public-private cooperation was both critical to the success of projects and more difficult to achieve than had been anticipated due to “organizational imperatives and philosophies that impede the development of such a relationship.”

USGAO (October, 1990)

"Social Security: District Managers' Views on Outreach for Supplemental Security Income Program." GAO/HRD-01-19FS.

This is a report of a telephone survey in which district office managers in 640 offices nationwide were questioned about outreach activities in the SSI program. The motivation for the study was a belief that potentially eligible recipients of this benefit did not know of their eligibility.

Findings of this study indicated that there was no clear understanding of the intended outcome of the outreach efforts that had been put in place in SSI offices, although managers felt that outreach was important. They also believed that they were doing enough outreach, although they spent only ten hours a month doing it and had no measures of their success in reaching potential enrollees. This study indicated that outreach was considered necessary, but there was no effort expended at the local level to determine its effectiveness.

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (1991a)

"Supplemental Security Income (SSI): A Review of Participation Rates and Outreach Activities." Washington, D.C.: AARP.

AARP and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (1991b)

"Participation Rates by the Elderly in the Medicaid Program: A Review of Participation Rates and Outreach Activities." Washington, D.C.: AARP.

A series of demonstration projects and reports emanated from the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) in the early 1990's on the subject of outreach. AARP staff, in conjunction with program personnel, undertook projects and studies of outreach in SSI, Medicaid, the FSP, and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program from which they produced manuals to help AARP volunteers participate in outreach activities to improve access to potential clients. Authors of this series reviewed program statistics, studied the literature on participation and problems of access, and interviewed State officials.

The AARP developed a model of outreach to older people that stressed producing and disseminating information about benefits of these public programs and the eligibility criteria for them. They used a multi-media approach and made presentations in community centers. Rather than concentrating on a single benefit program, AARP volunteers presented the benefits of each of the four programs and their individual requirements for participation. Overall, the AARP found that this multi-program approach to outreach received a positive response from older people. Outreach strategies that worked for one program, they believed, could be transferred to another. They recommended that outreach be made a mandated aspect of all public benefit programs.

AARP found that outreach has three components: dissemination of program information, client assistance with applications, and reduction of negative attitudes toward receiving public benefits. Hotlines, establishing referral networks, and reducing the literacy level of outreach materials to a fifth to seventh grade level and in several languages are helpful tools in reaching potential clients for public benefit programs. With regard to the FSP, AARP suggested that States

should target elderly people with their outreach materials and inform them through their SSI mailings of their potentially eligible status in the FSP. Mailings should also be targeted to rural areas. The authors also suggested that policy changes within the FSP be inaugurated, such as indexing the minimum benefit for inflation, paying small benefits on a quarterly basis, and simplifying the medical deduction so that more older people could use it. Person-to-person outreach using community leaders to disseminate information might also be important. They suggested that a single point of entry be established between SSI programs and the FSP. Moving application sites to agencies close to those in need as outreach locations was effective, as well as providing assistance to people making these applications.

Gary Silverstein and Michael Puma (1992)

"Evaluation of the AARP Outreach Demonstration Projects. Bethesda, MD: Abt Associates.

This outside evaluation of the AARP demonstration projects, which were begun in 1989 to increase participation among the elderly in four assistance programs, Medicaid, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs, SSI, and the FSP, found that the 20 demonstration sites were able to conduct outreach, but were unable to show statistically significant results. In a two-year effort, an impact analysis of 16 of the sites produced a great deal of anecdotal evidence that outreach activities attracted elderly persons in need of public assistance, but failed to reach isolated, elderly persons who are perhaps most in need.

The outreach was conducted through broad-based media efforts. The demonstration sites tracked calls to their toll-free numbers following public service announcements or mailings of information. Telephone calls requesting appointments and information were more numerous following periods of outreach activity in communities. The messages helped to eliminate incorrect information and reduced negative attitudes toward participation.

The authors reported that broad-based campaigns were often targeted to people who were ineligible, already receiving benefits, or were unwilling or unable to follow up on the application. Many may have been previously enrolled. The universe of those to whom the information would be particularly useful was much smaller than the outreach targeted. As a result of this observation, the authors recommended that cost-effectiveness of outreach could be enhanced by targeting certain communities that have large numbers of low income residents and where no other outreach is being undertaken. The authors also found that local demonstrations require flexibility in developing site-specific outreach and establishing appropriate activities and contacts with other agencies, as well as engaging the caseworkers in public assistance offices. They urged that client assistance with applications be a part of any outreach program and pre-screening be used as a targeting device in on-going outreach. Finally, applications should be available at a neutral site to reduce the effects of stigma among the elderly.

Wendee Wechsberg, et al., (1993)

"A Comparison of Injecting Drug Users Reached Through Outreach and Methadone Treatment" Journal of Drug Issues, Inc. 23(4), 667-687.

In this study, researchers compared certain characteristics of injecting drug users (IDUs) contacted either through outreach or through their participation in methadone treatments programs in four cities. Both the outreach and methadone treatment programs were part of the National AIDS Demonstration Research (NADR) program. The characteristics of both groups were also compared with a national probability sampling derived from the 1990 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse.

The authors reviewed the literature about outreach to patients with AIDS and identified common methods, such as sending ex-addicts as outreach workers into areas where drug use is known to be prevalent, using peer education programs among teenagers, and providing motivational messages for bringing people into treatment.

Both the outreach IDU population and the IDU population in methadone treatment were interviewed using structured, standardized protocols. The authors found that outreach accessed a population with different characteristics from those who were in methadone treatment programs. The outreach clients were older when they first injected drugs, had used drugs more extensively and for a longer period, and were less likely to have been in treatment previously. The authors conclude that outreach presents "attractive and appropriate alternatives to those groups that are underserved and most vulnerable." Recognizing differences within drug user populations provides an "impetus for continued innovation and refinement of new and current strategies." This is one of the few studies that compares clients reached through outreach with populations that come into programs through other means. This might be a useful approach in other areas of interest. Many studies of AIDS and drug prevention outreach programs report on a single outreach method: person-to-person, street-based approaches. Generally, they provide more description of the activities and settings for the purpose of understanding the context of exposure and usage than evaluation of outcomes (Weeks, ed. 1991).

Louise Warwick, et al. (1992)

"Evaluation of a Peer Health Worker Prenatal Outreach and Education Program for Hispanic Farmworker Families." Journal of Community Health. 17(1).

Hispanic migrant farmworker families received prenatal education from peer health workers in this study. This approach, similar to that used in drug and AIDS client assistance programs, stems from programs initiated during the Great Society in the 1960's. High health care costs continue to make the approach attractive to health care planners.

The project was undertaken in three migrant farmworker communities in the border area of Arizona near Mexico. The project recruited local women to further recruit and train other women in 12-week courses on prenatal health. The evaluation of this ten-month demonstration project for

low-income Mexican and Mexican-American women used both descriptive and survey methods to estimate the effects of the intervention on the clients and the peer health workers.

The evaluation found that the women studied shared many of their views on childbirth and subsequent care of newborns and young children with the peer health workers, allowing medical staff to understand the cultural context of prenatal and neonatal indigenous practices. Women attended classes and reported that they had incorporated the material presented to them into their plans for child care. The health care peer workers fulfilled their obligations under the demonstration, and they reported that the women were very pleased to take part in the outreach activities. The staff were satisfied, therefore, with the results of the demonstration.

The study is more successful as a description of cultural expectations of researchers and clients than a careful study of the effectiveness of outreach using convincing data. It does underscore the need to carefully record clients' perspectives on service provision and how these perspectives support or interfere with the goals and outcomes of programs planned for them.

In summary, this section which reviews client assistance methods shows that lack of information about programs is problematic, but that providing information alone, without case-management assistance, may not be sufficient to make benefit programs available to some potential clients. The required attention to hard-to-reach cases is not inexpensive and must be carefully targeted to be efficient. Again, changing target groups to reach those easier to serve makes client assistance appear to be effective, but may bring clients who would have enrolled on their own into benefit programs. Public-private partnerships are important in reducing negative attitudes of clients toward programs and reducing the costs of client assistance.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The literature reviewed in this paper addresses nonparticipation in government benefit programs using:

- Analyses of answers people have given in household surveys;
- Extrapolations from FSP participation and estimated eligible population data; and,
- Observations of and interviews with people living in poverty.

Nonparticipation in some of the studies has been treated as the inverse of participation, in others as an aside to other themes, and in still others as the subject of secondary analyses of household surveys. From this selection of literature, one can better understand the dynamics of participation in the FSP, reasons people give for their nonparticipation, and the disjunction between the requirements of government benefit programs and the lives of people who live on the margins of their own society.

Identifying reasons for nonparticipation is an important way to provide guidance to the FSP about equitable distribution of food stamps. This information can also provide a better understanding of specific client assistance methods that could be helpful in certain local food stamp offices. Survey literature, based on a microsimulation model, indicate that nonparticipation is associated with people who are older, have fewer children, less need, and more financial resources. On the other hand, people with greater need, those who are African American and other non-white minorities, those with more children, and those who are eligible for larger benefits are more likely to participate in the FSP.

Potential clients have offered as reasons for not applying for benefit programs, their lack of information about their eligibility and how to apply, the amount of the benefit not being worth the hassle entailed in the application process, and not wanting to assume the stigma of being a recipient of public benefits at the taxpayers' expense. Many of the reasons for nonparticipation, such as illiteracy and cognitive confusion, are not issues that will be discussed openly with a survey

researcher, but can be documented through observational studies and ethnographic fieldwork. On the other hand, when ethnographic and observational studies address nonparticipation in benefit programs, it is usually an aside or an addendum to another agenda (Rank 1994; Liebow 1993; Belenky 1987).

Issues identified as reasons for nonparticipation are often large categories and lack specific content. Why do people not know about the FSP? Why are they confused about their own potential eligibility? When they identify administrative problems as being disincentives to participation, are they speaking from their own experience or from hearsay? If the food stamp office is too far from where they live, do they travel equal distances for other services? A careful delineation of the content of the reasons given for nonparticipation is not available in the literature reviewed here.

Identifying reasons for nonparticipation by client group is helpful and can provide a better understanding of specific client assistance methodologies that can inform the practices of certain local food stamp offices. On the other hand, the development of this literature carries an inherent danger of stereotyping "the homeless" or "the elderly" in ways that ignore the immense heterogeneity within groups. Factors that keep people from taking part in benefit programs in which they are eligible may be found in quite separate target groups.

There are few studies of the interaction of clients and programs in which programmatic changes are suggested that might enhance access. A study of eligibility workers as gatekeepers would be useful in this regard as well as an analysis of food stamp rules and regulations and their effect on enrollment and participation. The locus of barriers to access is still difficult to identify from existing literature. For instance, when respondents indicate that they do not want the "hassle" of the application process, one does not know if the problem is within themselves or in the procedures and interactions in the food stamp office. Addressing such issues might provide policy and program guidance.

Evaluation of client assistance programs produces various indications of methods that are effective. While no study to date has produced statistically validated measures of the effectiveness of specific methods of conducting client assistance, many have provided valuable information about these activities. It is in the descriptive narratives of clients in service provision settings that an understanding of their problems of access will become more clear. A variety of studies using observational and ethnographic approaches would complement the more readily available reviews of statistical data on participation.

The literature is fruitful in discussions of nonparticipation in the FSP. Studies based on household surveys have provided broad descriptions of those most and least likely to participate in public benefit programs. Studies of actual demonstrations have depended upon the review of secondary data for narrative accounts of client interviews, but have enhanced their findings with statistical program data. Ethnographic and observational studies have provided primary data from clients through both self-reporting and researcher observation, but have not been able to develop alternative measures of effectiveness of methodologies for client assistance. With the limitations of each approach, the combination of literature from a variety of studies and reviews helps the reader understand the complexity of the issue of nonparticipation and use a combination of methods to understand the phenomenon better.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allin, Susan and Harold Beebout. "Determinants of Participation in the Food Stamp Program: A Review of the Literature." Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS, November 1989.

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "Supplemental Security Income (SSI): A Review of Participation Rates and Outreach Activities." Washington, D.C.: AARP, 1991a.

AARP and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "Participation Rates by the Elderly in the Medicaid Program: A Review of Participation Rates and Outreach Activities." Washington, D.C.: AARP, 1991b.

AARP and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "Food Stamp Program: A Review of Participation Rates and Outreach Activities." Washington, D.C.: AARP, 1991c.

AARP. "Public Benefits Outreach Conference Report." Washington, D.C.: AARP, 1992.

Bateman, Peter. "The Economic Aspects of Outreach." Practicing Anthropology. 13(2), 1991: 10-13.

Beebout, Harold, et al. (eds.). "Food Stamp Policy Issues: Results from Recent Research." Washington, D.C.: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 1990.

Belenky, Mary Field, et al. Women's Ways of Knowing. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986.

Casey, J.T., et al. "Data Privacy Issues for Food Benefit Programs; Final Report." Washington, D.C.: Price Waterhouse, 1994.

Coe, Richard. "Nonparticipation in Welfare Programs by Eligible Households: The Case of the Food Stamp Program." Journal of Economic Issues. 17(4) 1983.

Cohen, Neal L. "Stigma is in the Eye of the Beholder: A Hospital Outreach Program for Treating Homeless Mentally Ill People." Rochester, MN: The Menninger Foundation, 1990.

Curtis, Karen. "May I See Your Identification, Please?: The Changing Face of Emergency Food Assistance in Delaware." Paper presented at the Society for Urban Anthropology meetings, Atlanta, GA, December 2, 1994a.

Curtis, Karen. "Food Stamp Participation by Emergency Food Recipients." Practicing

- Liebow, Elliot. Tell Them Who I Am. New York: The Free Press, 1993.
- Martini, Alberto and Susan Allin. "Did the Characteristics of Food Stamp Program Entrants Change During the 1990-91 Recession?" Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS, December 1993.
- Nichols, Abigail C. Internal Memorandum to Dustin J. Van Vleet, Midwest Regional Director USDA, FNS, 9/26/89.
- Olson, Geraldine I. and Jing-jian Xiao. "Information-Seeking Characteristics of Hungry People." Journal of Home Economics. Fall, 1991: 11-16.
- Peterson, James L., et al. "Phase I & II Analysis for the Social Security Administration's Outreach Demonstration Projects." Baltimore, MD: Social Security Administration, 1993.
- Rank, Mark Robert. Life on the Edge. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Scott, James C. Domination and the Arts of Resistance. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Schafft, Gretchen, et al. "WIC Benefit Target Study: Phase I Report." Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS, April 1988.
- Schafft, Gretchen and Frances I. Randolph. Innovative Community Based Services for Older Persons with Mental Illness. Rockville, Maryland: NIMH, November 1994.
- Schafft, Gretchen. "Barriers to Participation in the Food Stamp Program Identified through Research Demonstration Project Grants." (unpublished) 1995.
- Silverstein, Gary and Michael Puma. "Evaluation of the AARP Outreach Demonstration Projects." Bethesda, MD: Abt Associates, 1992.
- Trippe, Carole. "Estimating Rates of Participation in the Food Stamp Program: A Review of the Literature." Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS, 1989.
- Trippe, Carole and Pat Doyle. "Food Stamp Participation Rates: January 1989." Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS, 1992.
- Trippe, Carole and Julia Sykes. "Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: January 1992." Alexandria, VA: USDA, FNS, 1994.
- U.S. Conference of Mayors. Barriers to Participation in Benefit Programs, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1988.
- USGAO. "Social Security: District Managers' Views on Outreach for Supplemental Security Income Program." GAO/HRD-01-19FS, October 1990.
- U.S. Senate, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. The Food Stamp Program: History, Description, Issues, and Options." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1985.

View, Virginia and Kim J. Amos. Living and Testing the Collaborative Process: A Case Study of Community-Based Services Integration. Arlington, Virginia: National Center for Clinical Infant Programs, 1994.

Warwick, Louise H., et al. "Evaluation of a Peer Health Worker Prenatal Outreach and Education Program for Hispanic Farmworker Families." Journal of Community Health. 17(1), 1992.

Weeks, Margaret R. "Community Outreach Prevention Effort." Hartford, CT: Institute for Community Research, 1991.

Wiecha, Jean L., Johanna T. Dwyer, and Martha Dunn-Strohecker. "Nutrition and Health Service Needs Among the Homeless." Public Health Reports 106(4), 1991: 364-374.

Wechsberg, Wendee M., et al. "A Comparison of Injecting Drug Users Reached Through Outreach and Methadone Treatment." Journal of Drug Issues, Inc. 23(4), 1993: 667-687.